

schluss an Schellers Ergebnisse wäre allerdings grundsätzlich danach zu fragen, *für wen* und *unter welchen Voraussetzungen* der Unterricht und die darin verwendeten Unterrichtsmaterialien (noch) gut verständlich sind. An dieser Diskussion könnte und müsste sich neben der Erziehungswissenschaft auch die Angewandte Linguistik beteiligen. •

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Grewendorf, Günther/Rathert, Monika, eds. (2009): *Formal Linguistics and Law*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. (Trends in Linguistics 212). ISBN 978-3-11-021838-1, 435 pages.

Law and language have always been closely intertwined. The present collection comprises fourteen studies that reflect various aspects of this multifaceted relationship and illustrates the variety of contributions that linguistics can make to both legal practice and the study of law. The volume is the offspring of a workshop on “Language and Law” held at Bielefeld University in February 2006 which aimed at exploring the connections between linguistics and jurisprudence. The authors – scholars and professionals working at the intersection of linguistics and law – produce a broad variety of research and real-life examples from the legal systems of Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the European Union. I will first outline the content of the individual contributions and then provide a discussion of the volume as a whole.

The book opens with an introductory chapter in which the editors provide brief excerpts of the individual papers and give an overview of past and current research projects on language and law. The remainder of the collection is structured into four parts. Each part consists of three or four papers and is dedicated to a specific area in which linguistics can contribute to the field of law, namely (1) the improvement of the comprehensibility of legal texts, (2) the identification of criminals on the basis of voice or text samples, (3) the automatic retrieval

of legal information, (4) the translation and interpretation of legislation in multilingual legal systems.

The papers comprised in Part 1 discuss the task of improving the comprehensibility of legal texts. Carl Vogel (“Law matters, syntax matters and semantics matters”) argues that formal semanticists can provide valuable advice for legislative drafting and for the interpretation of laws, particularly where syntactic, aspectual or lexical ambiguity is involved. Vogel supports his claims with a rich set of examples from Irish constitutional and statutory law. Stella Neumann (“Improving the comprehensibility of German court decisions”) analyses how the wordings of German court decisions can be made easier to understand. In a corpus study, she identifies three types of constructions that are difficult to understand for lay persons and yet occur frequently in German court decisions: sentences with multiple levels of embedding, complex noun phrases, and nominalisations. Neumann describes a psycholinguistic experiment in which she compared the comprehensibility of the original text of a court decision with that of two rephrased versions: an alternative version whose language was kept as simple as possible and a version that roughly exhibited the syntactic complexity of a typical newspaper report. She finds that this latter rephrased version is understood better than the original text or the overly simplistic version. Neumann attributes this result to the fact that there is a trade-off between syntactic simplicity and text cohesion. Monika Rathert (“Understanding a Riester-pension: A reply to Becker and Klein 2008”) presents a critical assessment of another psycholinguistic study into the comprehensibility of a legal text: Becker and Klein (2008) investigated how jurists, insurance agents and laypeople read and understand the provisions of a pension contract. Rathert criticises that the methods employed in their experiment do not allow for a principled way to predict comprehensibility and proposes Frame Semantics as a model with the potential to overcome this shortcoming.

The second part of the collection is dedicated to forensic linguistics. It deals with questions related to the identification of a perpetrator by comparing speech or text samples produced by the perpetrator and suspects respectively. Michael Jessen (“Forensic phonetics and the influence of speaking style on global measures of fundamental frequency”) investigates whether samples of spontaneous speech can be compared to speech data gathered from reading. His phonetic analysis of the recordings of 100 speakers shows that it is only under noisy conditions that the average fundamental frequency is significantly lower in reading than in spontaneous speech. Angelika Braun and Stefan Friebe (“Phonetic cues to speaker age: A longitudinal study”) ask whether some parameters of a person’s speech change with age. In a longitudinal phonetic study, they find that this is indeed the case for voice onset time in voiced plosives, vocal shimmer and speaking tempo. Jan Seifert (“Does speech reveal one’s age? On the use of gerontolinguistic topics for forensic authorship analysis”) asks whether certain lexical features in a text can serve as indicators of the author’s age. In his critical discussion of existing studies, he comes to the conclusion that a comprehensive theory of such age-markers has as yet not been developed and that thus no reliable indicators are available at the present time.

The papers comprised in Part 3 discuss projects that apply methods of computational linguistics to support legal information retrieval. Stephan Walter (“Definition extraction from court decisions using computational linguistic technology”) presents an approach to automatically identifying legal definitions in German court decisions. The method he applies exploits the fact that sentences containing definitions often follow certain linguistic patterns. Walter demonstrates that by searching for these patterns in a corpus of parsed court decisions, definitions can indeed be identified automatically at a high precision. The main difficulty, he points

out, arises from the fact that most state-of-the-art Natural Language Processing has not been adapted to the peculiarities of legal texts and thus still produces a certain number of errors. Emile de Maat, Radboud Winkels and Tom van Engers (“Making sense of legal texts”) apply similar techniques (parsing, detection of typical patterns) to resolve references within and between legislative texts and to extract a formal representation of the texts’ meaning. The system they describe has been put into practice by the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration. Doris Liebewald (“Interfacing between different legal systems using the examples of N-Lex and EUR-Lex”) evaluates the usability of existing legal information systems in the multilingual and cross-national context of the European Union. She demonstrates that the shortcomings of these systems are partly due to the fact that they are used for purposes other than those they were originally built for. The paper by Erich Schweighofer (“The LOIS system and beyond”) describes the development of a multilingual semantic network (WordNet) of legal terms and concepts with the aim of providing support for cross-linguistic legal information retrieval and database access.

The fourth and last part of the collection addresses issues specific to multilingual legal systems. The contributions by Karin Luttermann (“Multilingualism in the European Union. Status quo and perspectives: The reference language model”) and Agnieszka Doczekalska (“Drafting and interpretation of EU law – paradoxes of legal multilingualism”) both discuss the tensions arising from the European Union’s legal multilingualism on the one hand and the need for legal security on the other hand. Luttermann responds to this challenge by proposing a language policy for the EU in which the two most frequently spoken languages serve as reference languages and the provision of reliable translations into the respective national languages is left to the individual member states. In contrast, Doczekalska argues that the apparent paradoxes of the EU’s legal multilingualism disappear when considered in the concrete practical contexts of legislative drafting and legal interpretation. Andreas Lötscher (“Multilingual law drafting in Switzerland”) describes the workings of legal multilingualism in the Swiss Confederation from the perspectives of drafting and interpreting law. He provides a rich set of real-life examples that illustrate how specific translation and interpretation issues were solved. Lötscher demonstrates that legal multilingualism can lead to clearer and more carefully drafted legislative texts and that it can support the interpretation of laws. Finally, the paper by Jacqueline Visconti (“A modular approach to legal drafting and translation”) addresses the textual dimensions of multilingual legal drafting – as opposed to most other studies on the topic, which usually focus on terminological questions. Visconti analyses the cross-linguistic equivalences of conditional connectives and information structure found in English, French, German and Italian legal texts and proposes formal representations to capture these relationships.

The present volume provides a good overview of a new and growing field of research. It succeeds in portraying the breadth and variety of contributions that linguistics can make to the field of law and is probably unique in its composition. Some of the papers contained in the collection present outstanding original work – including, but not limited to, the contributions by Neumann, by Jessen, by Walter and by Lötscher (to name just one article per part). Some other papers tend to be somewhat heavy on literature reviews and sparse on genuine research, but they ensure that the book can also serve as an introduction and first point of reference to the state of the art. The editors’ decision to include these latter papers alongside the actual research articles is thus to be welcomed.

Readers of this volume learn of a field with great potential, but they also become aware that there is still a long way to go. Several authors emphasise (a) the need for thorough corpus-

based studies into the formal properties of legal language – despite its title, the book offers little in the way of formal linguistics but mainly approaches its topic from various angles of applied linguistics – and (b) the need for Natural Language Processing tools specifically geared towards the analysis of legal texts to help build the very corpora required for such studies.

Unfortunately, the volume's editing is not always entirely satisfying. Although multilingualism is one of its core topics and although a majority of its contributions discuss German-language examples, all papers are kept in English. It is, however, quite apparent that not all authors are equally familiar with English academic writing. While most papers are well written, a few contain distractingly high numbers of English grammar mistakes, cumbersome (and sometimes obscure) Germanisms and instances of faulty punctuation and inappropriate style, which at times obstructs reading. The volume would have benefited from having a native speaker of English proofread the texts or allowing contributions in German into the book.

As a whole, however, the present collection can be recommended to scholars and professionals alike who work at the intersections of law and language. It can serve as a first point of reference for scholars trying to familiarise themselves with the range of issues addressed in their field, and it can give professionals an impression of the state of the art and open up new perspectives. Anyone who is interested in the language of law, or in the contributions linguistics can make to legal practice, will find at least one article in this volume (and probably more) that bears some relevance to his or her own work. •

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